



INLAND STEEL BUILDING

30 W. Monroe Street

SUBMITTED TO THE COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS
NOVEMBER 1991



City of Chicago
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. It is responsible for recommending to the City Council that individual buildings, sites, objects, or entire districts be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law.

The Commission makes its recommendation to the City Council only after careful consideration. The process begins with an extensive staff study, summarized in this report, which discusses the historical and architectural background and significance of the proposed landmark.

The next step--a preliminary determination by the Commission that the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration--is important because it places the review of building permits for the property under the jurisdiction of the Commission during the remainder of the designation process.

This Preliminary Summary of Information is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation proceedings. Only language contained within the Commission's recommendation to the City Council should be regarded as final.

COVER: The lower two floors of the Inland Steel Building are recessed and the service core (at right) is set back along the Monroe Street side, providing an early example of open space at the base of a downtown skyscraper. Photograph by Ezra Stoller; courtesy of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

INLAND STEEL BUILDING

30 West Monroe Street

ARCHITECTS: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
Walter Netsch and Bruce Graham, designers

CONSTRUCTED: 1956-57

In 1956, foundations were begun for the first skyscraper to be built in Chicago's Loop following the twenty-year construction hiatus caused by the Depression and the Second World War. When it was completed the following year, the Inland Steel Building clearly demonstrated how American architecture had changed during those decades and attested to the influence of both the International Style and the work of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. The Inland Steel Building is a major early example of what has been called the Second, or American, Phase of the International Style; as such, it is an early example of the style that dominated American commercial architecture through the early 1980s. It was the first Loop office building designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, which had been founded in the city in 1936 and continues to be one of its major architectural firms. The structure was built as a signature headquarters for another important firm that had been started in Chicago, the Inland Steel Company.

The Inland Steel Company: The Client

On October 30, 1893, six Chicago and two Cincinnati investors incorporated the Inland Steel Company, and for \$8,800 purchased the equipment of the defunct Chicago Steel Works which had failed earlier that year as a result of the economic depression that plagued the nation. Located near North and Noble, the Chicago Steel Works had been started a few years after the Chicago Fire of 1871 to convert used steel rails into farm machinery attachments. When it failed, the company lost its real estate, but its steel processing equipment was available for sale.

The equipment was initially purchased by Roswell H. Buckingham, president of the failed company. The Chicago Heights Land Association, eager to attract industry to its community twenty-seven miles south of Chicago, offered Buckingham six acres of land and \$20,000 for construction of a steel plant. Buckingham accepted this offer and moved the equipment to Chicago Heights. However, he was unable to secure the capital necessary to operate the

business. Among those he unsuccessfully solicited for assistance was his cousin Clarence Buckingham, whose sister Kate later built Buckingham Fountain in her brother's memory. An associate of Clarence Buckingham's, William M. Adams, believed that he could raise the capital to profitably operate the equipment lying idle in Chicago Heights.

Adams was able to interest a neighbor, George H. Jones, then sales manager of a wholesale hardware firm, who in turn enlisted the aid of his father-in-law, Elias Colbert. Joseph E. Porter, a manufacturer of and dealer in farm implements, agreed to put up some capital as did Frank Wells, a real estate operator, and John W. Thomas, who had been a foreman in the Chicago Steel Works until it closed. Additional capital was still needed, however, and Jones decided to approach Joseph Block, a partner in the Block-Pollak Iron Company, dealers in used rail steel in both Cincinnati and Chicago, who was in Chicago visiting the Columbian Exposition. Block's firm had been a supplier to the Chicago Steel Works, and he believed the new venture could be profitable. Unable to convince his partners to invest company funds, Block put up his own money and also brought his twenty-two-year-old son, Philip Dee Block, into the venture. The eight partners incorporated the Inland Steel Company, purchased the dormant equipment, and took over the contract with the Chicago Heights Land Association.

Production began at Chicago Heights on January 16, 1894, by which time Jones had secured orders for 3,000 tons of steel. Unfortunately, the second-hand boilers that operated the plant were greatly overtaxed and constantly in need of repair, severely hampering production. Orders dropped as well, adding to the difficulties of the fledgling steel company. Nevertheless, Inland was able to produce 1,900 tons of steel during the first half of 1894, and by the end of the year business had improved so much that the president was able to report to the stockholders: "With all our disappointments and disadvantages in getting started, and errors, we are able to report a fair profit, and recommend that a dividend of three percent be declared on stock, in cash, and that the remainder of the profit be placed as a sinking fund or improvement fund."

The following year, William Adams withdrew from the company and his shares were sold to Leopold E. Block, Joseph's oldest son and a partner in the Pittsburgh firm of Dreyfus, Block and Company. In 1897, Leopold dissolved his Pittsburgh partnership and came to Chicago to manage the newly acquired and independently owned and operated Inland Iron and Forge. A few years later, Joseph's third son, Emanuel J. Block, also joined Inland, and for the next few generations the Block family continued in the management of the company.

In 1901, the Lake Michigan Land Company was offering fifty acres of land at what is now Indiana Harbor at the southern tip of Lake Michigan, fifteen miles south and east of Chicago Heights, to induce a steel company to locate there. The only condition was that the steel company had to invest one million dollars in construction of an open hearth plant. To raise the necessary capital, Inland Iron and Forge was sold to Republic Steel for \$500,000, additional Inland stock was issued, and bank loans were secured. Inland was then able to take advantage of the land offer and build a plant at Indiana Harbor, where production began on July 21, 1902.

Beginning in 1907, Inland took several steps toward becoming a fully integrated steel manufacturer. It purchased leases on mines on the rich Mesabi and Cuyuna ranges in northern

Minnesota so that it would no longer be dependent on outside sources for pig iron and could thereby increase production and reduce costs. The company also began purchasing its own freighters to transport ore from the Minnesota mines to Inland's mills.

By the time of Joseph Block's death in 1914, the assets of the company he had been instrumental in founding twenty years before had increased 190 times. The year he died, Inland's annual production was less than half a million tons; just three years later, it topped a million tons for the first time. The company continued to grow during the next two decades, adding new furnaces, mills, mines, and freighters and greatly increasing its production.

In 1935, Inland acquired Joseph T. Ryerson and Son, Inc., at that time the world's largest steel warehousing operation with ten warehouses in major cities in the East and Midwest. This Chicago company had been started in 1842 by Joseph T. Ryerson, whose grandson Edward L. Ryerson was its president at the time of the acquisition and later served as chairman of Inland's board (1940-1953). In the late 1930s, Inland acquired two other companies which became its subsidiaries, Inland Steel Products Company and Inland Steel Container Company.

By the time of the Second World War, Inland's greatly expanded production capacity enabled it to make an important contribution to the Allied war effort. During the Battle of Britain, Winston Churchill wrote to Inland citing the company's "Ledloy" steels as a major contributor to England's cause. After the U.S. entered the war, Inland began producing steel for bombs, shells, tanks, planes, and ships, winning awards from the government for "high achievement in the production of war material" and "outstanding achievement on vital wartime contracts."

After the war, Inland shifted its production back to domestic needs and participated in the nation's post-war prosperity by manufacturing steel for consumer products such as automobiles, stoves, refrigerators, and washing machines. This was a time of great optimism for the company, the steel industry, and the nation. Dwight D. Eisenhower, who had led the Allied forces to victory in the war, was as President leading the United States to expanded economic and political power throughout the post-war world. There seemed to be no limits to the nation's potential for future growth. The steel industry was very much a part of that potential for growth and did not hesitate to flex its muscles, as when Inland president Clarence Randall appeared on nationwide television in 1952 as a spokesman for the industry to protest President Truman's seizure of the nation's steel plants as a result of a steelworkers' strike.

Inland continued to expand, and by the mid-1950s annual steelmaking capacity had increased to more than 6,500,000 tons, making it the nation's eighth largest steel manufacturer. It was also the only major steel manufacturer located in Chicago, which would soon displace Pittsburgh as the center of American steel production.

Inland Steel had done business from several locations during the first six decades of its existence. Initially, business was transacted from the plant or from P.D. Block's rooms in the Victoria Hotel in Chicago Heights; the Victoria was designed by Adler and Sullivan and constructed in 1892-93. In 1898, Inland moved into its first downtown office in the Marquette Building, designed by Holabird and Roche and completed in 1894. In 1904, the company moved into the First National Bank Building at the northwest corner of Dearborn and Monroe streets which had been completed just one year earlier from a design by D. H. Burnham and



The Inland Steel Building stands in striking contrast to its neighbor, the Majestic Building (1905), which encloses its structural frame in heavily ornamented terra cotta. (*Hedrich-Blessing, photographers*)

Company. Inland remained in the First National Bank Building for over fifty years, eventually occupying more than two full floors.

In the early 1950s, company president Clarence Randall created a planning committee to study the company's long-range needs, including its space requirements. As Joseph L. Block, grandson of Inland's founder and company president from 1953 to 1959, recalled:

. . . he [Randall] suggested that one of the questions which might be considered by the committee was the steadily increasing need for office space by the expanding personnel of our general offices. Could we continue to secure additional floor area in the First National Bank Building . . . a difficult problem in a fully occupied building. Could our offices be air-conditioned and modernized in other respects?

A subcommittee headed by Leigh B. Block, Vice President in Charge of Purchases, was appointed and went to work on the problem. After a careful study of various alternatives the committee recommended that we build our own building, something none of us had previously envisioned. Their arguments were persuasive. We could have modern offices designed to meet the exact needs of our organization; by spacing tenant leases we could be fortified for growth far into the future; and we could erect a structure which would be a credit to our company, our city, and our industry. Our officers and directors were convinced; the rest is now history.

Through various civic involvements, Leigh Block was acquainted with Nathaniel Owings, partner in the architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. Once the decision to build had been made, Block approached Owings to ask if the firm would be interested in the commission. Block proved an ideal client. William Hartmann, another Skidmore partner, later recalled: "Leigh Block was more than just a steel man, he was very much interested in the arts and was certainly interested in modern art and architecture." Skidmore accepted the job, with Hartmann as partner in charge and Walter Netsch as design partner.

A site directly across the street from the bank building was chosen, and in August, 1954, negotiations for lease of the land began. Demolition of existing structures on the site began on September 6, 1955; foundation work for the new skyscraper was begun in January, 1956; and in November of that year, the topping out ceremony was held. The building was completed in 1957, and Inland Steel began operating from its new offices on January 13, 1958.

Although Naess and Murphy's Prudential Building of 1952-55 was the first skyscraper completed in downtown Chicago since Graham, Anderson, Probst and White's Field Building in 1934, the Inland Steel Building was the first new structure in the Loop itself following the twenty-year hiatus caused by depression and war. While the Prudential derives directly from skyscraper design of the late 1920s, Inland Steel demonstrates the changes that had occurred in modern architecture during the intervening decades, particularly the influence of the International Style and the work of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe that would shape skyscraper design for the next few decades.

The International Style in America

Although it developed in Europe during the decade following the First World War, the International Style was given its name by two American architectural historians, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson who introduced the style to an American audience in a exhibit they organized at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1932. The exhibit and its accompanying catalogue *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922* attempted to document and explain the work of Le Corbusier in France, Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in Germany, and J.J.P. Oud in Holland during the 1920s. Hitchcock and Johnson demonstrated that these architects had developed a distinctive style that both reflected nineteenth-century concerns with functionalism and responded to the social upheaval in Europe following the war; the architects involved employed the newest structural techniques and materials in ways that abjured the styles of the past.

According to Hitchcock and Johnson, three characteristics distinguish the style:

The principles are few and broad. They are not mere formulas of proportion . . . they are fundamental There is, first, a new conception of architecture as volume rather than as mass. Secondly, regularity rather than axial symmetry serves as the chief means of ordering design. These two principles, with a third proscribing arbitrary applied decoration, mark the productions of the international style.

In order to achieve the effect of volume, buildings are cubic in form with flat roofs and smooth wall surfaces; these surfaces are achieved through the use of materials like concrete, steel, and glass. Windows have minimum exterior reveals and frequently turn the building corner, ornament is eschewed, and cantilevering is sometimes used for dramatic effect. Exterior walls are seen as the sheer envelope that encloses interior space rather than as a heavy shell supporting the structure.

The earliest International Style buildings in the United States were residences, beginning with the 1927-29 Lovell "Health" House in Los Angeles designed by Richard Neutra, a Viennese architect who had emigrated to the U.S. in 1923. Raymond Hood's 1931 McGraw-Hill Building in New York was the first American skyscraper to demonstrate aspects of the style, in its cubic massing and horizontally banded windows.

Unquestionably the finest early International Style skyscraper to be built in the U.S. was the Philadelphia Saving Fund Society (PSFS) Building designed by George Howe and William Lescaze in 1929-30 and constructed between 1930 and 1932. Architectural historian William Jordy has written: "In the development of the bare-bones esthetic of modern skyscraper design, PSFS is the most important tall building erected between the Chicago School of the eighteen eighties and nineties and the metal-and-glass revival beginning around 1950."

The PSFS Building consists of a twenty-nine-story, T-shaped tower that sits on a three-story base sheathed in sheer polished granite. The base is punctuated by a thirty-foot high band of windows that curves around the corner, marking the second-floor banking space inside.



Pronounced vertical piers mark the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society (PSFS) Building (1929-32), the first American skyscraper in the International Style. (From William Jordy, *American Buildings and Their Architects*, 1976)

Above the base, the tower is sheathed in sand-colored limestone; elevators and some service elements are located in the cross bar of its T-shape. Windows are arranged in horizontal bands that turn the corners of the building; this horizontality is interrupted along the long elevations by emphatic continuous piers that project from the wall plane.

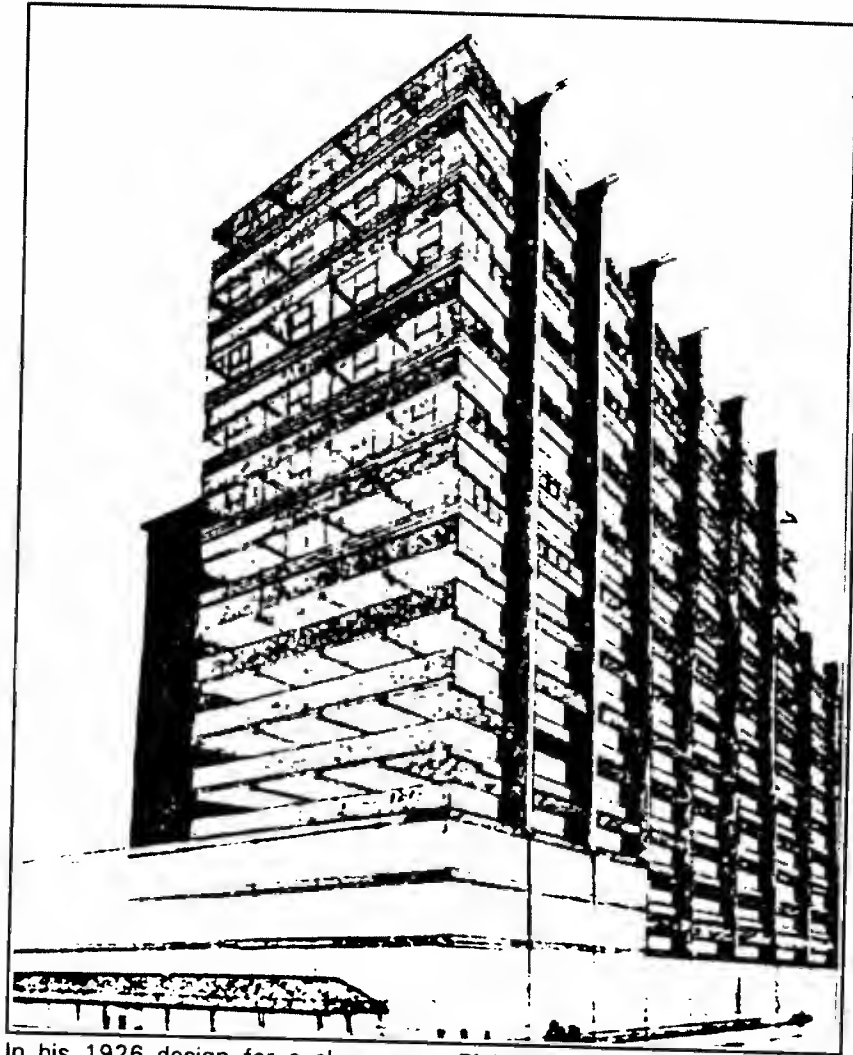
The emphasis of the piers is unusual in the International Style and represent, according to William Jordy, a constructivist emphasis within the movement. Generally, structural elements would not be so prominently expressed on the exterior, which is more often treated as a clearly non-supporting envelope around the structure. According to Jordy, "in the International Style, revealed structure typically occurs as exposed columns inside the boxed volumes of interior space." This element of the design had more to do with the client than the architects. Howe and Lescaze proposed cantilevering the floors beyond the skeleton frame so that uninterrupted bands of windows could dramatically proclaim the non-bearing nature of the exterior walls. The client, however, was adamant that the height of the structure be emphasized by bringing the vertical lines of the columns into the wall plane.

The final design for PSFS with its projecting structural columns is not unlike an unexecuted design that Richard Neutra did in 1926 for a store and office building in a project for an ideal city. Although Lescaze denied that the Neutra design had any direct influence of the PSFS design, the effect is similar and both designs point toward the handling of the columns in the Inland Steel building. Jordy summarizes the significance of the PSFS tower:

. . . the boldly projecting columns on the exterior of the PSFS office tower . . . anticipate Mies' late work, in what has come to be called by some the Second (or American) Phase of the International Style. Indeed, the dichotomy in PSFS between the cubist and the constructivist modes makes it of special interest. As no other building in the International Style, it mediates between its European and American phases. Synthesizing one, it prophesies the other.

The arrival of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) in the U.S. in 1937 marked the beginning of the American phase of the International Style. Mies had been Director of the Bauhaus School, a major exponent of the International Style, from 1930 until he closed it in 1933 in response to growing Nazi hostility toward the modernism it represented. Making a living in Europe was rather precarious for him after that. In 1936, Mies received a letter from John A. Holabird of Holabird and Root who was chairman of a search committee looking for someone to head the architecture department at the Illinois Institute of Technology. Eventually Mies accepted the position and settled in Chicago in 1938.

During the next decade Mies designed several buildings that both firmly established the International Style in this country and transformed that style. Architectural historian William Jordy contends that Mies's work changed after his arrival in the U.S. Most of his European work had quite strictly followed the canon of the International Style, consistently employing its distinguishing design characteristics. These works, most especially his much-published 1922 project for a glass skyscraper, exhibit the interest that Mies shared with other practitioners of the style in transforming exterior walls into sheer curtains of glass and other smooth materials



In his 1926 design for a skyscraper, Richard Neutra pulls the vertical columns outside the wall plane in a manner that prefigures Inland Steel. (From William Jordy, *American Buildings and Their Architects*, 1976)

that project beyond and mask the supporting frame. After his arrival in Chicago, Mies's work began to demonstrate more of an interest in the direct expression of the frame, an interest that had characterized the skyscrapers of the Chicago School built here around the turn of the century.

The structural frame is emphatically expressed in the facade of the Promontory Apartments, completed in 1949 on South Lake Shore Drive. Originally conceived with a steel-and-glass curtain wall, the twenty-two-story structure was executed in reinforced concrete with windows and brick spandrels recessed slightly behind the rectilinear concrete frame, expressing much more forcefully than the original design the grid of the supporting frame. The same year the Promontory was completed, construction began on Mies's first executed steel-and-glass curtain wall design, the twin towers of 860-880 Lake Shore Drive. The steel frame of each

twenty-nine-story tower is three bays wide and five bays long; these structural bays are clearly articulated by the columns and spandrels of the cellular facades. The width of each bay is further divided into four windows by narrow I-beams that rise the height of the structure. The facades have been reduced to the expression of underlying structure, and through subtle detailing, elegant proportions, and the use of handsomely finished materials, structure has been raised to the level of art. These structures had a profound effect on the development of American architecture and demonstrate Mies's transformation of the International Style. William Jordy writes: "Mies essentially turned the original International Style inside out after reaching the United States. Whereas in the twenties the frame had been typically boxed within its membrane-like container, after the example of Mies' American work it was as likely to appear on the exterior."

Because Mies's Chicago work was not at the time well known to the American public, it was a New York skyscraper that introduced the International Style to this general audience. In 1949, the Lever Brothers Company, an international manufacturer of soaps and detergents, asked Skidmore, Owings & Merrill to design a new headquarters building on New York's Park Avenue. Gordon Bunshaft was the partner in charge and chief designer of Lever House, which was constructed between 1950 and 1952. Lever House is very much an exercise in the early, European phase of the International Style. The overall form consists of two intersecting cubic volumes: a tall, twenty-one-story tower resting upon a broad, two-story horizontal base. The curtain wall reads as sheer glass with the structural frame entirely recessed behind it. In a monograph *SOM: Architecture of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1950-1962*, architectural historian Henry Russell Hitchcock wrote:

The isolation of the curtain-walled slab in an area otherwise built up with brick-walled skyscrapers of set-back silhouette . . . represented the opening of a new period of skyscraper design, not only for New York but throughout the Western World.

. . . the lightness of effect produced by the rather delicate scale and the transparency of the continuous cladding had been approached long before this--in some Chicago buildings of the 1890's and again in the studio block of the Bauhaus in the mid-twenties--but never with skyscraper dimensions. Nor was the external expression arbitrary; it expressed very clearly the new character of large-scale office-building organization and planning. Thus it opened both aesthetically and technically a new stage in the design of office buildings over and above the novelty of its open handling of an expensive site.



Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's Lever House in New York (1950-52); Inland Steel has been described as "a Lever House turned inside out." (*From William Jordy, American Buildings and Their Architects, 1976*)

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill: The Architects

The architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill had been in existence a little more than a decade when it produced the design for the Lever House. Louis Skidmore (1897-1962) was born in Indiana, worked his way through architecture school at M.I.T., and then spent some time traveling through Europe on an M.I.T. Rotch fellowship. There he met Eloise Owings, a fellow Indianan who was in Paris studying fashion design. Her studies were financed by her older brother, Nathaniel Owings (1903-84), a 1927 graduate of Cornell's architecture school. After hearing about the "dynamic, impetuous Nat" from his sister, Skidmore was anxious to meet this man "who wanted to be the 'greatest architect in the world,' but who also had a flair for cost figures, balance sheets, and sales." The two young architects met and became friends after Skidmore's marriage to Eloise.

In the early 1930s, Skidmore became chief designer of the 1933-34 Chicago Century of Progress World's Fair and had Owings join him as development supervisor of the fair. His work at the fair introduced Skidmore to the world of the American businessman; approximately 700 corporations exhibited at the fair, and Skidmore had to deal with them all.

In 1936, the two brothers-in-law formalized their partnership and opened an office in the Monroe Building at 104 South Michigan Avenue. The following year, Skidmore and Owings received a commission for alterations to the American Radiator Building in New York. One condition of the commission was to have a major influence on the development of the firm: American Radiator insisted that one of the partners be in New York to supervise the work. Skidmore decided to go, leaving Owings in charge of the firm's three-person Chicago staff. He made the decision, he later explained, because "a couple of guys like Owings and me could only feel comfortable if each had his own 'bailiwick,'" and "the New York World's Fair was just starting and there were a lot of good consultancies around." Skidmore's move marked the beginning of the firm's national, decentralized character which would be a distinguishing feature in the coming decades.

Two other decisions made in the late 1930s significantly influenced the development of the firm. The two partners decided that the firm would only design in the "contemporary" style based on the work of the proponents of the International Style. They also decided that they would employ specialists in a variety of fields so that the firm could offer clients broad design expertise. They hired J. Walter Severinghaus, a housing specialist; Robert W. Cutler, a hospital expert; William S. Brown, experienced in prefabricated housing; and Gordon Bunshaft, a designer whose commitment to the International Style greatly influenced the firm's designs during its early decades. They also decided to hire an architectural engineer in order to realize the firm's professional goals, later expressed by Skidmore:

Up until the war, most U.S. architects were trained to work only on small plots: they left the problem of coping with large-scale projects--industrial plants, airfields--to the engineers. We felt that if the architect wasn't to limit himself to domestic housing, he would have to win back his role as the creator and coordinator of big projects.

John O. Merrill (1896-1975), an engineer with the Chicago firm of Granger and Bollenbacher, was brought in as a limited partner in 1939, and the firm became Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

In addition to having a long-term impact on the firm, these decisions also well positioned it to receive its first large-scale commission. Many architectural firms had trimmed their staffs because of the private building shortages of wartime, but Skidmore had the staff capability to execute a massive government project that came its way in the early 1940s. The federal government needed to build an entire town to accommodate the Manhattan Project, the U.S. effort to develop an atomic bomb. Because of the secrecy required for the project, an isolated site on mile-wide Oak Ridge in Tennessee was chosen. By 1942, Oak Ridge, as the town itself was called, extended six miles along the ridge and housed a population of 75,000 in 15,000 single-family houses, 13,000 dormitory units, 5,000 trailers, and 16,000 hutments and barracks. Skidmore expanded its staff to 450 architects, engineers, designers, and draftsmen to handle this project which required site surveying and planning as well as design.

The Oak Ridge experience proved useful in obtaining the firm's first major Chicago project, the Lake Meadows complex along King Drive between 31st and 35th streets. Financed by the New York Life Insurance Company with federal assistance, Lake Meadows included ten high-rise apartment buildings, an office building, a shopping center, and recreational facilities constructed between 1952 and 1960.

As mentioned earlier, it was the 1949 commission for Lever House that brought national attention to the firm. A few years after completion of Lever House in 1952, Leigh Block paid a visit to Nat Owings to ask if Skidmore, Owings & Merrill would be interested in designing a corporate headquarters for the steel firm.

The Inland Steel Building: A Celebration of Steel

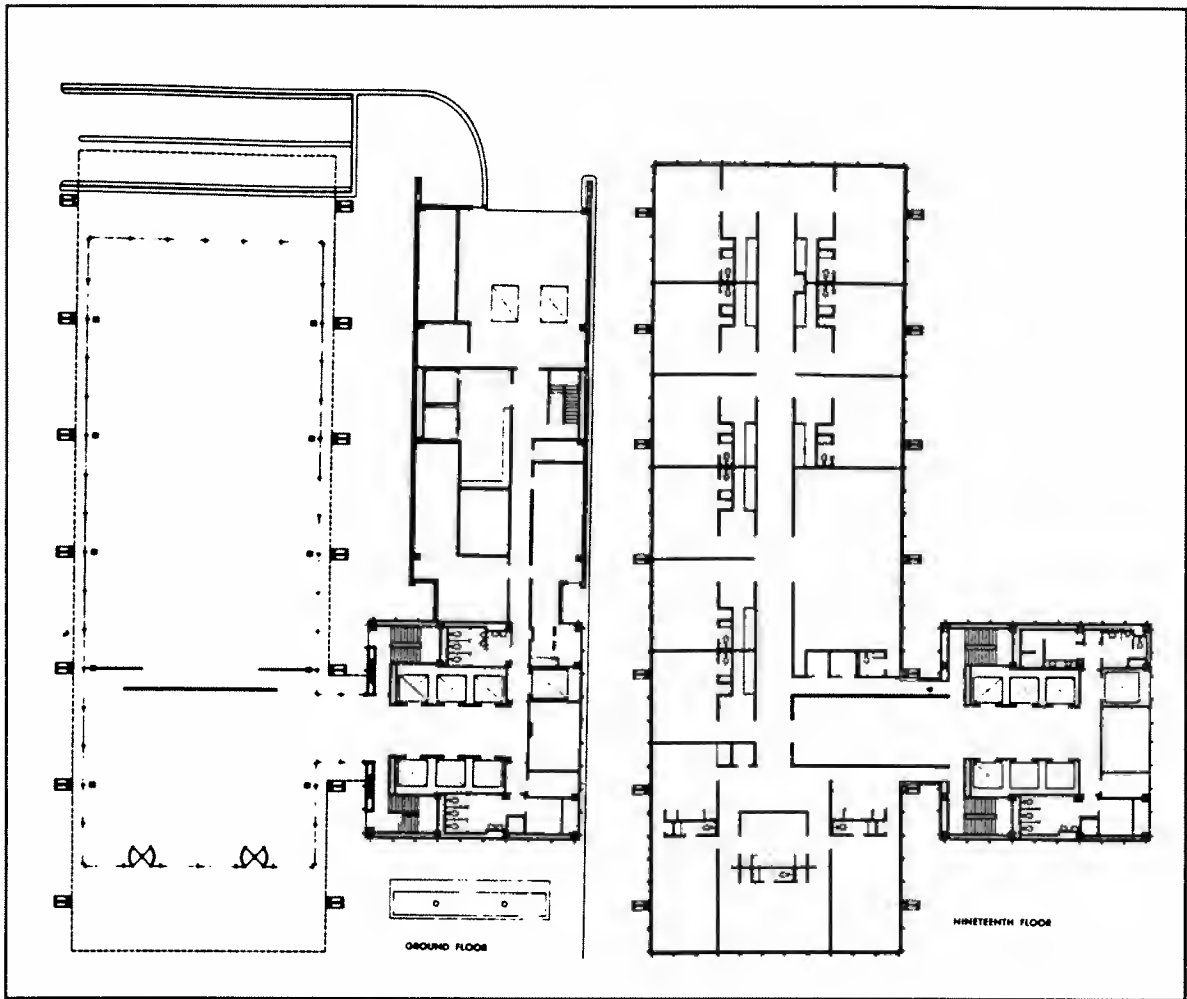
Inland not only made a commitment to the city in deciding to build a headquarters building here--"We're a Chicago company and we're going to stay here," as Joseph Block said--it also made a commitment to building a structure of the highest quality. The building committee formally declared that:

the difference in investment between an exceptional building and an adequate commercial building is not sufficient over the useful life of the structure, to warrant building anything but an exceptional type, embodying architectural and engineering interest that would provide a unique institutional identification for the company over an extended period of years.

The original design partner on the project, Walter Netsch, was born in Chicago in 1920 and received his architecture degree from M.I.T. in 1943. He joined Skidmore in 1947 to work on Oak Ridge. Later he worked in the firm's San Francisco office, from which he had just returned in 1954 when the Inland commission came into the Chicago office. While in San



Inland Steel introduced the Miesian grid of steel and glass to downtown Chicago. (*Howard N. Kaplan, photographer; courtesy of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill*)



Floor plans of the ground floor (left) and the nineteenth floor (right), where the executive offices of Inland Steel were located. (From Arthur Siegel, ed., *Chicago's Famous Buildings*, second edition, 1969)

The curtain wall is approximately 65% glass and 35% stainless steel. The glass is double pane, the outer being green-tinted, heat-absorbing glass that eliminates glare. The windows are framed and the columns clad in nickel-chrome stainless steel; a duller brushed finish is used for the sheathing of the service core. The steel used in the building, both structurally and for cladding, was manufactured by Inland and its subsidiaries. The glistening steel of the office tower and the matted steel of the service core proclaim the structural and expressive qualities of Inland's product and make this a trademark building, a symbol of corporate identity. As Leigh Block once explained: "We wanted a building we'd be proud of, one that spelled steel."

The service core contains the elevator lobby, six passenger elevators, one service elevator, two staircases, washrooms, and mechanical systems. The segregation of these uses, separating "served from servant spaces," and the placement of the columns outside the curtain wall provide each office floor with uninterrupted space 58 feet wide and 178 feet long. The distribution system for heating, air conditioning, electricity, and telephone lines is contained within the floor, increasing the flexibility of the column-free space. Access to these systems

Francisco he had worked on the conceptual design for the Crown Zellerbach Company headquarters building (constructed 1957-59) in which all service functions were accommodated in an enclosed structure separate from the adjoining office tower; supporting columns were placed outside the curtain wall, creating unobstructed interior space. Netsch employed this concept in his initial design for the Inland Steel Building. Elevators, stairs, toilets, and vertical mechanical systems were located in the enclosed service core so that the office tower contained nothing but usable space. Not even the vertical columns supporting the structure interfered with the interior space, as these were placed inside a double curtain wall consisting of an exterior and an interior glass wall. Mechanical systems were encased in brightly colored ductwork running inside the two planes of glass so that the "skeleton, veins, and skin [of the structure] would all be one," according to Netsch. The nine columns along the Dearborn Street facade provided the primary division of that facade; between these columns the outer glass wall was divided vertically into two sections while the inner wall was divided into four sections, providing a lively articulation and a sense of depth to the facade. "It wasn't at all Miesian," Netsch later commented. With the exception of a small entrance lobby, the entire ground floor of the office tower was open, to accommodate an outdoor garden of steel sculpture.

Later in 1954, Skidmore received the commission for the U.S. Air Force Academy to be built in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Netsch took on that project, and Bruce Graham was promoted from supervising partner to design partner on Inland Steel. Graham was born in Bogota, Colombia in 1925, received his architecture degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1948, and joined Skidmore in 1951. When Graham took on the Inland Steel commission he eliminated the outer glass wall, leaving the supporting columns outside the plane of the remaining single curtain wall and, in effect, pulling the columns out beyond the wall plane. Horizontal components of the mechanical systems were run through the floors. The number of exterior columns was reduced from nine to seven, and the articulation of the curtain wall was simplified and became more Miesian. The ground floor was enclosed, providing more ample lobby space as well as either exhibition or tenant space.

As built, the Inland Steel Building consists of two primary and distinct elements: a rectangular nineteen-story, 252-foot glass-walled office tower along Dearborn Street and, to the east, a square twenty-five-story, 332-foot service tower sheathed in stainless steel. To the north of the service core is a two-story white brick subsidiary structure that contains shipping and receiving facilities, mail room, and the ramp leading to a basement parking garage. The structure occupies only sixty-six percent of its 192' x 120' lot; the first two floors of the office tower are set back twenty feet along Monroe Street with the upper floors cantilevered to the street line, and a small flag court with planter occupies the open space in front of the service core.

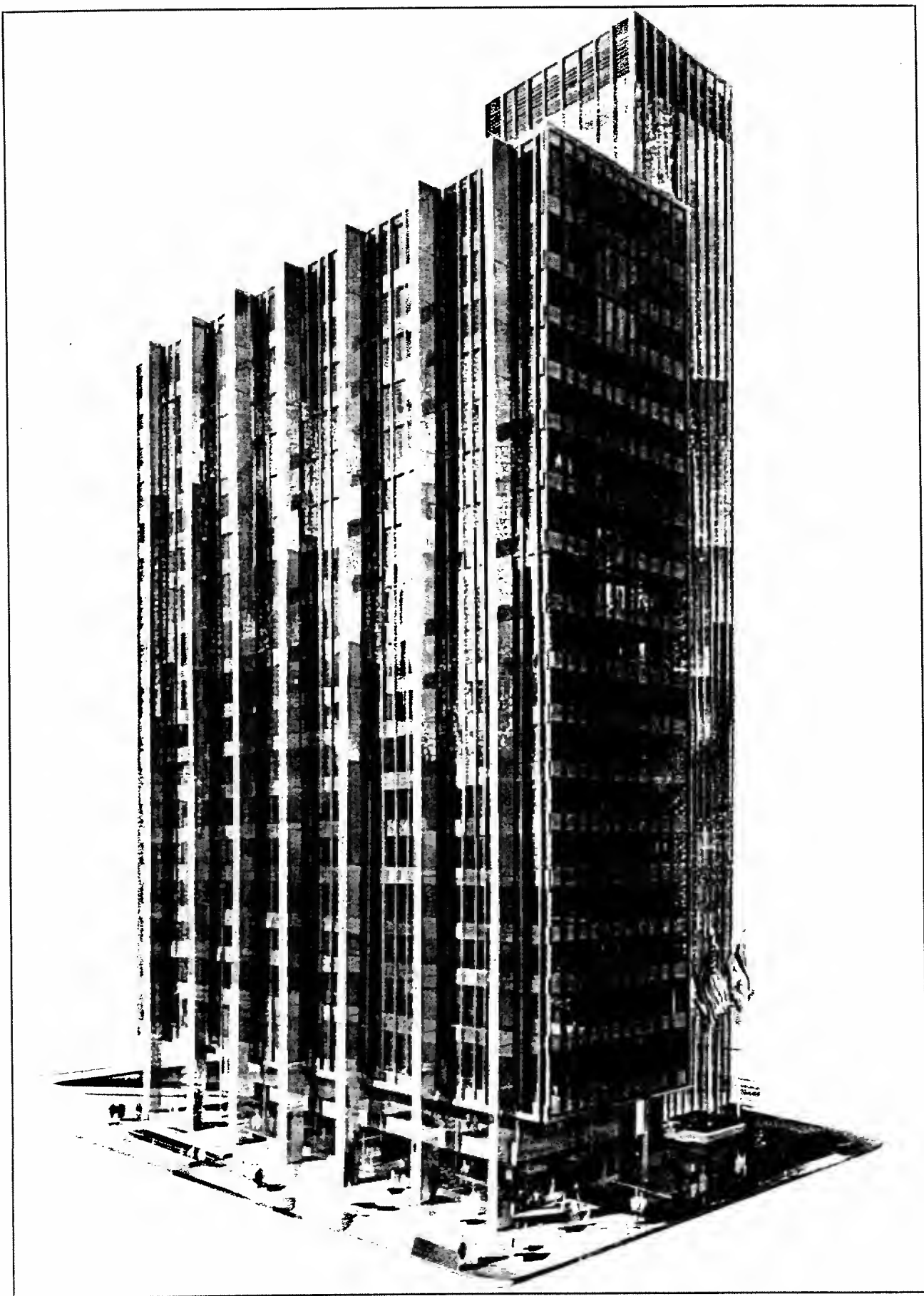
Seven pairs of columns placed entirely outside the curtain walls carry the building's weight and provide a distinctive and insistent visual rhythm to the long facades. Extending between the columns are sixty-foot girders that carry the individual floors; when it was constructed, this was the widest clear span ever employed for a multi-story building. Inland Steel was structurally innovative in other ways as well: it was the first major structure in Chicago to employ steel pilings for its foundation, and its curtain wall was one of the thinnest ever used, being only two feet, ten inches deep.

is provided within each of the 5'-2'' modules that define the office floors. Movable partitions of interchangeable materials, such as steel, glass, and wood, subdivide the interiors. These can be easily rearranged as space needs change, realizing Mies van der Rohe's ideal of "universal space" that can change and adapt to different uses over time.

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill designed the interiors of the building as well, an arrangement that is far more common today than it was then. Much of the furniture was specially designed for the building. Inland Steel originally occupied the upper eight floors of the building with its executive offices on the top floor. This was the most richly appointed floor with teak-paneled doors and cabinets and subdued lighting.

A major feature of the interior was the extensive art collection displayed in the lobby and on the Inland floors. This reflects a major interest of Leigh Block who, with his wife Mary, was a noted art collector; he was also a trustee of The Art Institute of Chicago (1949-1975, life trustee 1975-87) and later served as president (1970-72) and chairman (1972-75) of that institution. Block said at the time, "Of course, the most important thing is the sale of steel. But on the other hand, we believe that painting and sculpture belong in a modern office building to enhance its beauty." American sculptor Richard Lippold, whose work in steel the Blocks had seen at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, was commissioned to create a monumental sculpture for the lobby of the building. His fifteen-foot "Construction" consists of "stainless steel rods . . . suspended in a delicate network of wires of gold, stainless steel, and fire-red enamel" and is meant to be a "commanding symbol of steel." It rests in a reflecting pool of water against a wall of polished black Belgian marble. An article in the Winter, 1957, issue of *Art in America* described the work: "Steel embodies modern man's structural mastery of tension, one of his unique achievements; Lippold has stirringly celebrated this, stringing a web of praise with bold delicacy." For the executive offices, American sculptor Seymour Lipton created a bold, seven-foot sculpture called "Hero." The same article in *Art in America* stated: "Lippold has successfully expressed what man can do; and in the same material, steel, Lipton has wrought the image of what man can be." The executive floors also contained a number of paintings depicting American industry, including works by such prominent artists as Georgia O'Keefe, Willem de Kooning, Ben Shahn, Stuart Davis, and Abraham Rattner.

The building received much attention in the press at the time it was built, not only for its innovative design and its art collection, but also because Inland's decision to build it was perceived as a contribution to the regeneration of a dormant downtown. *Inland Architect* wrote at the time that its construction "comes as a bold bid for big business to stay in downtown Chicago and rebuild it with a new imagination and confidence. Showcase and showplace for steel, a prestige building for its owners, so it is for the city, so it is as a piece of architecture." *Architectural Forum* wrote: "the new Inland building supports the notion that there may be new life for the old downtown areas of big cities." It was appropriate that the first tenant of the ground-floor commercial space was the Chicago Association of Commerce and Industry, an organization devoted to promoting the city. The Inland Steel Building not only celebrated the company's product, it also expressed Inland's confidence in itself, the city, and the steel industry and its role in the nation's economy.



The classic design that epitomizes American skyscraper design of the 1950s appears today as pristine as it seemed at the time of its completion. Inland president Clarence Randall later recalled an early conversation he had with Nathaniel Owings about the design: "Nat asked me what kind of a building I would like. I told him I wanted something very conservative and temperate. I said 'I want to preserve the best of the past. I want this building to be like a man with immaculate English tailoring--his clothes are so good you are not aware of how well he is tailored.'" The building that Randall got may not have been that conservative, but like a good English suit, its design is timeless.

In 1982, the Inland Steel Building was awarded the twenty-five-year honor award of the Chicago chapter of the American Institute of Architects. At the time, architectural critic M.W. Newman wrote of it:

Inland . . . is urbane, polished, open-looking . . . dapper, not brash, an elegant headquarters building that enlivens the streetscape. At nineteen stories, it is the right height to make an impression without making a dent, and fits its corner neatly.

. . . The Inland Steel Building came out of the springtime of Chicago's postwar construction boom. In a steel-building city, it retains a lightness, serenity, and polished grace that continue to make it an influential emblem of modernism.

In a city with a hundred-year history of distinguished architecture, the Inland Steel Building is an important monument to a particular period of that history and stands as a testament to an important Chicago manufacturing firm and as a major early work of one of the city's major architectural firms.

Criteria for Designation

Applicable Criteria: The staff recommends that the Commission initiate the designation for the Inland Steel Building. In our opinion, the structure meets three of the criteria for landmark designation set forth in Chapter 2-120-620 of the Municipal Code.

CRITERION 1: Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the Chicago of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

The Inland Steel Company can trace its beginnings back to shortly after the Chicago Fire of 1871 when the Chicago Steel Works was established to convert used steel rails into farm machinery attachments. The company failed in the economic depression of 1893. In October of that year, eight investors incorporated the Inland Steel company and for \$8,800 purchased the equipment of the failed steel works. Inland began production in 1894, and over the next fifty years the company became a fully integrated steel producer with its own mines, freighters, and manufacturing subsidiaries. Its greatly expanded capacity enabled it to make a major contribution to the Allied effort during the Second World War. After the war the company shifted its production back to domestic needs and participated in the nation's post-war prosperity by manufacturing steel for consumer products such as automobiles, stoves, refrigerators, and washing machines. By the mid-1950s, Inland had so expanded its capacity that it was nation's eighth-largest steel producer. It was also the only major steel producer located in Chicago, which would soon displace Pittsburgh as the center of American steel production. The 1950s was a time not only of great prosperity but also of tremendous optimism for the nation, the steel industry, and for the company itself. When it outgrew the space it had occupied in the First National Bank Building for nearly fifty years, Inland Steel decided to build its own headquarters building in downtown Chicago. The structure they built was meant to be an "exceptional building . . . that would provide a unique institutional identification for the company over an extended period of years." Although the Inland Steel Company sold the building several years ago, it remains headquartered in this gleaming steel and glass structure that still represents this major Chicago manufacturing firm and the importance of the steel industry in the American economy of the post-war decades.

CRITERION 4: Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.

The Inland Steel Building was the first skyscraper built in Chicago's Loop following the twenty-year hiatus caused by the Depression and the Second World War. When it was completed in 1957, it

demonstrated the changes that had taken place in American architecture during those decades and attested to the influence of both the International Style and the work of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. The term "International Style" was coined by architectural historians Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson to describe the work of several progressive European architects during the 1920s. Responding to nineteenth-century ideals of functionalism and to the social upheaval in Europe following the First World War, these architects employed new structural materials and techniques to create buildings that abjured the styles of the past. One of the leading exponents of the style, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, settled in Chicago in 1938 and during the next decade designed several structures that demonstrated the basic principles of the style. American architects responded to his work, and during the 1950s the Miesian grid of steel and glass came to dominate skyscraper design in the U.S. The structure that introduced this style to a broad audience was Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's Lever House (1950-52) in New York. Just a few years after the completion of Lever House, Skidmore designed the Inland Steel Building which introduced the steel and glass grid to downtown Chicago. Whereas the somewhat earlier Prudential Building (1952-55) by Naess and Murphy recalled skyscraper design of the 1920s, the Inland Steel Building was the harbinger of the buildings that dominated American downtowns throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

CRITERION 5: Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, or the United States.

The Inland Steel Building was the first skyscraper in downtown Chicago designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, an architectural firm that had been started here in the 1930s. Louis Skidmore (1897-1962) began working with his brother-in-law Nathaniel Owings (1903-84) on the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition; Skidmore was chief designer for the fair, and he asked Owings to be development supervisor. After the fair, the two opened an office together. In 1939, engineer John O. Merrill (1896-1975) joined the firm which then became Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. From the beginning, the firm was a nationwide, decentralized operation that specialized in corporate architecture. Beginning with their Lever House in New York, the firm dominated that specialty for several decades, producing corporate headquarters and speculative office buildings throughout the world. Skidmore shaped Chicago's contemporary skyline with its John Hancock Building (1969), Sears Tower (1974), One Magnificent Mile (1983), NBC Tower (1989), and numerous other structures built during the decades since Inland Steel initiated the transformation of the city's downtown.

Significant Historical and Architectural Features: Based on its evaluation of the Inland Steel Building, the staff believes that all exterior elevations and roofs and the ground-floor interior spaces should be identified as significant historical and architectural features.

This staff analysis and the accompanying report summarizing the historical and architectural background of the proposed landmark should be regarded solely as preliminary documents. Both are subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation proceedings. Only language contained within the Commission's recommendation to the City Council should be regarded as final.

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Additional research material used in the preparation of this report is on file at the office of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks and is available to the public.

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